PATTERNS OF POWER

The Coin No Sword Could Mint

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How Warlords Who Had Already Won Everything by Force Came, Again and Again, to Pay Real and Avoidable Costs for Something Only a Disarmed Priest Could Give Them — the Bishop of Rome and the Abbasid Caliph, Read Side by Side, Neither Man Commanding a Soldier Worth Counting, Both Men Sought Out for Centuries by Warlords Who Held Every Soldier That Mattered, Because Both Offices Still Held the One Thing No Sword Has Ever Been Able to Cut From a Population That Was Formed, Since Infancy, to Believe It Belonged to No One Else

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A STUDY IN THE PATTERNS OF POWER

Preface

A man who has already won a war by force has no obvious reason to keep paying for it afterward. And yet the record of two civilisations, separated by a sea, a language, and a scripture, shows the identical strange behaviour repeated across centuries: warlords who held every soldier, every fortress, and every treasury a kingdom required went on, year after year, oath after oath, to a man who held none of those things, and paid him — in tribute, in marriage, in public submission — for something his own poverty and powerlessness made him the only man alive able to sell. In Latin Christendom that man was the Bishop of Rome, stripped of the legions that had once stood behind his office. In the Abbasid caliphate he was the Caliph of Baghdad, stripped of the armies that had once obeyed his ancestors. Neither man could have raised a company of soldiers to save his own life. Both men were visited, married into, and paid tribute by warlords who could have executed them on a Tuesday and ruled by Wednesday without a single subject lifting a hand to stop it.

This essay is about why they didn't, and it insists on answering the question from the ground up rather than from the throne down, because the warlord's calculation makes no sense at all until the believer's world has been built in full first. A population raised from the cradle to understand its own baptism, its own marriage, its own eventual burial, its own weekly summons to prayer, as things that flow through one particular, recognised channel and no other, is a

population that has already decided, long before any warlord arrives, what a rightful ruler is. The warlord does not need to share that belief to notice it is there, and a warlord who notices it is there has found something worth more than another regiment: a shortcut past the whole slow, expensive business of making a conquered population obey him for its own reasons, by simply borrowing the reasons it already has. This essay follows two warlord traditions who found exactly that shortcut, four centuries apart, on opposite sides of the same medieval world — the Normans who took southern Italy and England, and the Turkic and Persian dynasts who took Baghdad — and it spends real time, before it reaches either warlord, on what the ordinary man they were both trying to rule actually carried in his head.

Part I — What a Christian's Life Ran On

Begin with the cradle, because the Church did. In an age when a substantial share of infants died within their first year, the newborn's baptism was not a ceremony scheduled at a family's convenience; it was, in the theology every parish priest taught and every parent absorbed before they could question it, the event that determined whether a child who died within days would be received into heaven or consigned, in the doctrine of the age, to limbo — a fate no parent could risk delaying. This single fact explains a detail this essay will return to directly: centuries later, when Pope Innocent III placed all of England under interdict and forbade nearly every sacrament in the realm, he still permitted baptism to continue, in private, behind shut doors, because even a pope prepared to paralyse a kingdom's religious life to make a political point balked at the thought of newly dead infants going unbaptised on his own authority. That single exception, carved out of an otherwise total prohibition, is itself a measurement of how seriously the doctrine was held by the men enforcing it, not merely the men living under it.

From infancy the sacramental structure never let go. The Fourth Lateran Council, convened by Pope Innocent III in November 1215 and attended by some twelve hundred bishops, abbots, and priors — the largest and most representative council the Western Church had

yet assembled — issued seventy canons that gave the machinery of ordinary belief its most precise and enduring shape. Its first canon defined transubstantiation as binding doctrine: the bread and wine of the Mass did not merely represent the body and blood of Christ, they became it, a change effected by no hand but a validly ordained priest's. Its twenty-first canon, *Omnis utriusque sexus* — "all people of both sexes" — commanded every Christian who had reached the age of discretion, fixed at twelve, to confess every sin at least once a year to his own parish priest before receiving the Easter Eucharist, on pain of excommunication during life and, more permanently, exclusion from Christian burial at death; the priest hearing that confession was to act, in the council's own description, as *medicus animarum*, a physician of souls, prescribing penance the way a physician prescribes a cure. A twenty-second canon, easy to pass over, reached even further into the most private moment a family could face: a physician attending a sick patient was himself bound, under threat of excommunication, to see that a priest was summoned first, because the soul's health was to take precedence over the body's even at a household's most desperate hour. Marriage, too, ran entirely through the Church's own jurisdiction and no other — banns published, degrees of forbidden kinship checked, a union blessed or refused by a authority no secular court could override — and death closed the circle exactly where it had opened: extreme unction administered to the dying, absolution sought before the final breath, and burial, if the rites had been properly kept, in the consecrated ground of the parish churchyard, among one's own dead, rather than outside its walls with the unbaptised, the excommunicate, and the unshriven.

Layered over this life-cycle was a communal one. The liturgical calendar — Advent, Christmas, Lent's forty days of fasting, Holy Week, Easter, the long procession of saints' days that doubled, in most parishes, as market days and holidays alike — gave the agricultural year its shape and gave every villager, literate or not, a shared clock no secular authority controlled. The cult of the saints and the pilgrimage to their shrines, the parish's own patron and his feast day, the relics housed in the local church and the healing or protection a household believed it could draw from proximity to them — all of this was lived religion, dense, constant, and load-bearing in the most literal sense: it was the structure an ordinary household actually leaned its hopes upon, for a harvest, for a birth, for a recovery from illness, for the fate of a soul.

And excommunication, the sanction sitting behind nearly every canon this section has named, was not a paper penalty in a world built this way. To be cut off from the sacraments was, in the plain terms the age itself used, to be cut off from the ordinary means of salvation — denied the Eucharist, denied absolution, denied burial among one's own community's dead — a social and spiritual death pronounced while the body was still living. This is the world a Norman adventurer or a Norman duke walked into when he crossed into Italy or crossed the Channel, and it is the world that makes sense of everything he did next.

Part II — The Bishop Who Lost His Legions

The office that governed this world had not always been as poor in soldiers as it was rich in this authority. Under the Christian emperors of the fourth century, the Bishop of Rome sat inside an empire whose legions, however distant, still in principle stood behind the peace of the Church. That protection dissolved with the Western Empire itself. Through the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries the popes governed a city repeatedly threatened by Lombard dukes with real armies and no particular reverence for Roman ceremony, and looked, in turn, to a Byzantine exarch in Ravenna and then to the rising Frankish monarchy for whatever military shelter either could spare. The papacy's own attempt to convert this dependence into a standing territorial base — the Papal States, whose founding charter traces to Pippin the Short's donation in the 750s — gave the office a scrap of land to call its own but nothing resembling an army capable of matching a determined Lombard, let alone a Norman. What the office retained, intact and entirely undiminished by any of this military collapse, was the one claim no army had ever been able to manufacture: the specific, scripturally grounded assertion that the Bishop of Rome held the keys Christ himself had given to Peter, and that whoever this bishop bound or loosed was bound or loosed in Heaven as well as on earth. A population raised inside Part I's

sacramental world had no independent way to test that claim and no obvious reason to doubt it; it was, for that population, simply how the world worked. By the mid-eleventh century, when the first Norman adventurers began carving out territory in southern Italy, the office had held this claim, entirely disarmed and entirely unchallenged in the ordinary believer's own understanding, for the better part of six centuries.

Part III — Melfi, 1059

The Normans who arrived in southern Italy in the early eleventh century, ostensibly as pilgrims and mercenaries, needed no one's permission to take the land they took. Robert Guiscard, the sixth son of a minor Norman baron with nothing to leave him — a segundón in every sense this collection's own study of Europe's younger sons has already traced — fought his way to control of Calabria and Apulia by the same method his brothers and cousins had used across the peninsula: raiding, sieges, and the systematic destruction of crops in any town that resisted him. In 1053 a Norman army had gone so far as to defeat and capture a reigning pope, Leo IX, on the field at Civitate — and even then, holding the successor of Peter as their own prisoner, the Norman victors did not treat him as merely a defeated enemy commander. They treated him, in the words the age itself used, with the reverence owed to Peter's own successor, a distinction the Normans themselves evidently felt mattered even at the moment of their most complete military triumph over him.

Six years later the distinction became policy. On 23 August 1059, at a council held in the Norman capital of Apulia with a hundred bishops present, Robert Guiscard knelt before Pope Nicholas II and swore an oath of fealty. In return, Nicholas invested him with the titles Duke of Apulia and Calabria and, prospectively, Duke of Sicily — territory Guiscard did not yet hold and would have to conquer from its Muslim emirs, meaning the pope was licensing a future conquest as

readily as ratifying a past one. Guiscard's own chosen style, recorded in the oath itself, named its source with unmistakable precision: *"Robert, by the grace of God and Saint Peter, Duke of Apulia and of Calabria, and future Duke of Sicily by their aid."* He bound himself further to an annual, recurring, and entirely quantifiable payment: twelve deniers of Pavia for every yoke of oxen in his possession, owed every year to Saint Peter, to the pope, and to the pope's successors in perpetuity. Historians who have examined the treaty's wider significance note that it did something considerably larger than legitimate one duke's landholding. It formally detached the papacy's own claim to protection from the Holy Roman Emperor, whose special duty of guarding Peter's heirs had stood since Charlemagne, and reassigned that duty to a band of Norman adventurers most of Christian Europe had, within living memory, regarded as little better than brigands.

Nothing about this transaction was necessary in the narrow sense. Guiscard's army, not Nicholas's blessing, held Calabria and Apulia in 1059, and would go on within the year to besiege Cariati and continue the conquest of the south with or without a pope's signature. A tribute owed in perpetuity to a man with no soldiers of his own to collect it is not a cost imposed by force; it is a cost accepted, freely and repeatedly, by a man already powerful enough to refuse it. What Guiscard purchased with that tribute was not territory. It was the conversion of a fact his own sword had already established — that the land was his — into a fact the sacramental world of Part I would recognise as something more than occupation:

a dukedom held, in the exact words Guiscard chose for himself, by the grace of God and Saint Peter.

Part IV — Hastings, 1066–1070

Seven years after Melfi, on the opposite coast of the same continent, a Norman duke with a far larger prize in view ran the identical calculation. William of Normandy sent an embassy to Pope Alexander II specifically to obtain a papal blessing for an invasion of England he had every material means to launch without one. He got it. Alexander sent back a papal ring, a banner — the *vexillum*, a cross-charged gonfanon that the Bayeux Tapestry shows twice among the Norman ranks — and a written edict instructing the largely autonomous English clergy to submit to William's new regime once it was established. William had made his case to the pope by presenting Harold Godwinson as an oath-breaker, a man who had sworn to support William's own claim to the English throne and then reneged; whatever the merits of that argument, its acceptance in Rome converted an invasion for a disputed crown into something the whole of Latin Christendom could read as a sanctioned cause, fought, as English Heritage's own account of the campaign puts it, under a banner that let the Normans see themselves as something closer to crusaders than aggressors. It should be said plainly, because the discipline this essay holds requires it, that the papal banner rests on a single contemporary source — William of Poitiers, the duke's own chronicler — and modern historians have debated exactly how

far Alexander's sponsorship extended before treating the story as settled. What is not in dispute is what happened after the battle was won.

The Norman soldiers who had killed at Hastings did not walk away from the field believing themselves absolved by victory alone. The Bishops of Normandy, backed by the authority of Pope Alexander II through his legate Ermenfrid of Sion, issued a penitential ordinance — probably in 1067 — that assumed, and required the victorious army itself to accept, that killing even in a sanctioned war left a real, spiritually consequential debt. Its terms were exact and graduated: a year of penance for every man a soldier knew for certain he had killed at Hastings itself; forty days for every blow struck against a man whose death could not be confirmed; lighter but still real penances for violence committed in the months between the battle and William's coronation, and again for anything after. This is not the behaviour of an army that regarded the whole apparatus as a formality to be endured. It is the behaviour of men who had been formed, since infancy, inside exactly the sacramental world Part I describes, and who took its accounting of sin and its price with genuine seriousness even at the height of their own triumph.

The practical consequences of Rome's sponsorship reached well past the battlefield and well past the individual soldier's conscience. Alexander's edict to the English clergy — men who staffed every parish in the country, who had baptised, married, and would one day bury every household in it — materially eased the English church's submission to a foreign conqueror in a way no garrison could have

accomplished on its own; a clerical structure the population had never stopped trusting on its own terms was now, on the one authority that structure itself universally recognised, instructed to treat William's kingship as legitimate. William paid for this in the same currency Guiscard had used at Melfi: he restored Peter's Pence, the annual English payment to Rome that had quietly lapsed under Edward the Confessor, a debt he had no material need to resume and resumed anyway. And when his hold on the country proved shakier than the battle alone had suggested — tested hard by the risings of 1069 and 1070 — William did not simply lean harder on the army that had already conquered the whole kingdom. He sent to Rome again, and was crowned a second time, at Winchester, under the eyes of Ermenfrid himself and two cardinal legates, an act his own garrisons could not have performed for him and that he judged, evidently, worth the asking.

Part V — What a Muslim's Life Ran On

The Islamic case rests on a different theological architecture entirely, and it deserves the same patient construction from the ground before any warlord's calculation can make sense of it.

The ordinary Muslim's day was structured, five times over, by an obligation no ruler administered and no priest was needed to perform: the five daily prayers, at dawn, midday, afternoon, sunset, and night, each preceded by ritual washing and each performed facing the same fixed point on earth, the Kaaba at Mecca. There is no clergy standing between the worshipper and God in this act; any adult Muslim may lead a prayer, and the great majority of the five daily prayers were, and are, performed alone or among family rather than in a mosque at all. But once a week this private structure became a public one, and it is here that the ordinary believer's life and the political order over him were welded together in a way that recurred, without exception, every single Friday of his life. The midday congregational prayer, the *jumu'ah*, and the sermon that preceded it, the *khutba*, were from the earliest years of Islam an occasion on which the community's ruler, or his named representative, addressed the gathered faithful — a practice tracing to the Prophet's own custom of speaking at Friday gatherings in Medina, formalised by the first caliph, Abu Bakr, who used his own inaugural khutba to pledge

his rule to the Quran and to Islamic tradition. What the khutba said, every week, in mosque after mosque across the breadth of the Muslim world, was a fixed formula naming the reigning authority by name and title and calling on God's blessing upon him: *"O God, bless the ruler of the age... and make him kind and favourable to his people."* Withholding that name, or substituting a rival claimant's, was not a subtle diplomatic signal reserved for chancelleries. It was the single most public act of political recognition or repudiation available in the entire Islamic world, performed aloud, in every mosque, in front of every worshipper, every week, whether that worshipper could read a single word of the theology behind it or not.

The doctrinal seriousness behind this practice ran deep enough that at least one major school of Islamic law, the Hanafi, held that the very validity of the Friday congregational prayer depended on it being performed under a recognised authority's sanction at all — without a caliph or his acknowledged deputy standing behind the prayer, jurists in this tradition held, the obligation to hold it in congregation did not fully apply, which is as direct a statement as the medieval Islamic world ever produced of the idea that ordinary worship and legitimate rule were not two separate questions but one. Beyond the Friday prayer, the believer's year and his wealth were governed by obligations with the same weight: the fast of Ramadan, kept by the whole community together for a full lunar month; zakat, the obligatory giving of a fixed proportion, customarily two and a half per cent, of a Muslim's accumulated wealth to the poor, calculated and expected annually; and the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca every adult Muslim of sufficient means was obliged to make once in a lifetime, drawing

believers from every province of the Islamic world into a single shared act performed nowhere else on earth. Disputes among neighbours, questions of inheritance, contracts, and marriage ran through the qadi's court, applying a law, Sharia, that claimed divine rather than merely royal sanction — a legal structure the ordinary townsman or villager encountered constantly and that answered, in the last instance, to religious rather than purely political authority.

The doctrine that tied all of this to the person of the caliph specifically, rather than to Islamic practice in general, was worked out with unusual precision by the Baghdad jurist al-Mawardi, writing in the very decades a warlord dynasty held every soldier in his own city. Al-Mawardi held that the appointment of a rightful imam or caliph was *fard kifaya* — an obligation resting on the Muslim community as a whole, discharged if some portion of the community fulfils it, but a genuine religious deficiency for the whole community if it is not fulfilled by anyone at all. In his own reasoning: religion required political authority to protect it, and political authority required religion to make it legitimate and effective, the two functions inseparable and both descending from the office prophethood itself had once performed directly. A Muslim community with no rightly constituted caliph was not, in this doctrine, merely inconvenienced. It was religiously incomplete — a claim with the same practical weight, translated into this essay's terms, that excommunication and denial of burial carried in Part I's Christian world.

Part VI — Baghdad Under the Buyids

By the time al-Mawardi wrote, the caliph he was defending had not commanded an army in generations. The mechanism by which that happened is itself instructive: a decade of rival military strongmen had already, before any single dynasty took permanent hold, competed to be named to a specific office, *amir al-umara*, "commander of commanders" — Ibn Ra'iq secured it in 936, then lost it to the Turkish general Bajkam, who lost it in turn to others, each successive holder seeking the same formal grant from the same powerless caliph rather than simply ruling in his own name outright. This is worth pausing on before the Buyids ever enter the story, because it shows the pattern was not the eccentric preference of one unusually pious warlord but a competitive field's shared, repeated behaviour: whoever held Baghdad by force still wanted the caliph's own seal attached to that fact.

In 945, the youngest of three Daylami brothers from the Caspian region, Ahmad ibn Buya, entered Iraq and took Baghdad outright, leaving, in the words of the modern historiography of the dynasty, "the Abbasid court with no real option but to submit to their authority as de facto rulers." Ahmad held the city, the treasury, and every soldier that mattered. He did not rule in his own unadorned name. He accepted from the caliph al-Mustakfi the very office his

predecessors in the field had already competed for — amir al-umara — along with the honorific *Mu'izz al-Dawla*, "Fortifier of the State," and the contemporary chronicler Miskawayh recorded the transaction in words that name the whole mechanism directly: the caliph, Miskawayh wrote, "resigned to him the government of the kingdom." A caliph with no soldiers *resigned* a government to a general who could have simply taken it; the verb itself concedes that something was being formally transferred, in the one currency the caliph still possessed, that raw seizure alone would not have supplied. The Buyids who followed Ahmad governed for over a century as Zaydi and then Twelver Shi'a rulers over a population and a caliphate that remained overwhelmingly Sunni, using inherited Sasanian Persian titles like *Shahanshah*, "king of kings," alongside their caliphal honorifics — two entirely different currencies of legitimacy, drawn from two entirely different traditions, run in parallel because the audiences that recognised each did not overlap and neither, on its own, would have satisfied the other.

Part VII — Baghdad Under the Seljuks

The Buyid arrangement ended not by conquest alone but by invitation. In 1055, the reigning caliph, al-Qa'im, himself sent to the Seljuk chieftain Tughril Beg — already master of a rapidly expanding Turkic confederation across Iran and Khurasan — asking him to come to Baghdad and remove the Buyids, whose own internal disorder and conflict with the caliph's court had become intolerable. Tughril came, deposed the last Buyid ruler, and expelled the Turkic commander Arslan al-Basasiri who had briefly held the city in the Fatimid caliphate's interest. From the caliph he received the title *sultan* — the first non-Arab ruler in Islamic history to bear it — a title that named, in a single word, exactly what Tughril already was in fact and had not previously had a recognised name for.

The relationship's real cost is where the case turns from formality into something more clearly load-bearing, because Tughril did not stop at a title he could have simply assumed. He pursued marriage into the caliph's own family, seeking the hand of al-Qa'im's daughter — and the record shows this was neither easy nor uncontested. The caliph himself resisted the match; contemporary chroniclers describe genuine friction over the negotiation, and the eventual wedding gifts were distributed with a precision — ten thousand dinars to the caliph, ten thousand to his wife, five thousand to his son, three

thousand to the bride's mother — that reads less like ceremony than like the settling of a hard-fought bargain between two parties neither of whom fully wanted to make it on the other's terms. A sultan who already held Baghdad by force, who could have deposed or executed the caliph outright and ruled without any of this, instead spent real diplomatic capital forcing a reluctant caliph into a marriage alliance neither the sultan's own soldiers nor the caliph's own guards were required to approve. That expenditure, freely chosen against real resistance, is the clearest possible evidence that what Tughril was purchasing was not available for the taking by force alone.

Part VIII — Two Cases, Read Together

Set beside each other, the structural identity is exact enough to state plainly. In both cases, an office that had once commanded genuine coercive force — the imperial legions behind fourth-century Rome, the caliphal armies of the early Abbasids — lost that force entirely, over generations, while retaining, intact, the one specific claim a population formed from infancy to recognise as the source of rightful authority: Petrine succession on one side, the caliphate as prophethood's rightful continuation on the other. In both cases the disarmed office survived centuries not because anyone protected it by the sword but because ordinary believers — Christians receiving sacraments no other hand could validly administer, Muslims hearing their ruler named or pointedly unnamed every Friday of their lives — never stopped treating that office's own sanction as part of what made a ruler a ruler rather than merely an occupier. And in both cases, warlords who held every material instrument of power a state requires nonetheless approached these disarmed offices, across generations and dynasties, and paid real, avoidable, and quantifiable costs for a recognition that pure force could not manufacture.

The logic that makes this pattern legible rather than merely curious is simple enough to state without borrowing any special vocabulary: a man who already holds total power by force has no need to pay for

anything he does not require, so when he pays anyway — in specie, in oath, in a marriage he had to fight to secure — the payment itself is the evidence. Twelve deniers of Pavia, owed every year to a man with no soldiers to collect it, is not a costless gesture. A second coronation, requested by a king already in full military possession of the kingdom he was being crowned to rule a second time, is not a costless gesture. A marriage forced through over a caliph's own resistance, when the alternative was simply to depose him, is not a costless gesture. Each of these acts only makes sense, only earns back what it cost to obtain, if the population beneath the warlord genuinely distinguished, in its own understanding of the world, between a ruler who held this recognition and a ruler who merely held the sword — and reserved for the first something the second, with identical force at his back, would not have received on the same terms.

Part IX — The Honest Objection

The obvious objection to everything this essay has argued is that none of it need be more than an old and well-understood trick: a strongman and a compliant cleric, running a performance on a population too formed, too frightened, or too uneducated to see past it. This objection deserves to be taken seriously rather than waved off, and the honest way to test it is to find a moment when the performance, if that is all it was, would have been exposed — a moment when the disarmed authority actually tried to use its claimed power against a ruler's wishes, and to see what the population under both of them actually did.

The clearest such moment on the Christian side is the interdict Pope Innocent III laid on the whole of England, from 23 March 1208 until 2 July 1214, after King John refused to accept the pope's own choice of Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury. For over six years, Mass was suspended across the realm; marriages could not be solemnised in a church; the dead could not be buried in consecrated ground. A contemporary chronicler's account of an earlier, similar interdict laid on France in 1200 describes the felt experience in terms that read as genuine horror rather than mere inconvenience: "the sealed doors of the churches, Christians shut out from entry as though they were dogs... the bodies of the dead not given to burial

according to Christian rites." Innocent, for his part, took evident care to limit the human cost even while pressing his political point — instructing that infants still be baptised in private rather than risk their souls to make a sharper example, and that the dying still receive confession and viaticum — a restraint that is itself a small piece of evidence about how seriously even the pope enforcing the sanction took the stakes he was playing with. The interdict did not produce a popular rising against King John. It took his own barons' anger, a threatened French invasion, and six years of slow attrition before John finally submitted, in 1213, in a ceremony in which he surrendered his kingdom to the pope outright and received it back as a papal fief.

The honest complication, and it belongs here rather than smoothed away, is that the record does not show unanimous, unwavering popular reverence throughout those six years. Some evidence suggests a portion of the English population grew angry not only at John but at the Church itself, for withholding the sacraments from ordinary people who had done nothing to deserve the punishment — a resentment that, if genuine, suggests the population's belief in the interdict's own justice was not automatic or complete. This is not evidence that the underlying belief was false or empty; a population that questions whether a particular *use* of an authority's power was fair is not the same as a population that doubts the authority's power is real at all, and the same six years of genuine hardship, genuine grief over unburied dead, and genuine anxiety over unbaptised children are far harder to explain if the whole arrangement had been transparent theatre nobody actually believed in. What the interdict

shows, read fully rather than selectively, is a population that took the stakes seriously enough to suffer over them for six years, and an authority confident enough in those stakes to spend six years pressing them, while both sides also showed the ordinary human capacity to resent a punishment even while accepting the power behind it as real. This is neither the picture the cynic wants nor the picture of uncomplicated universal piety a devotional history would prefer. It is the more difficult and more honest picture in between.

On the Islamic side, the equivalent evidence is less a single dramatic episode than the sheer, sustained doctrinal seriousness with which jurists across the tenth and eleventh centuries kept arguing the caliphate's necessity at all, often in evident tension with whichever warlord actually held power at the time rather than as flattery composed to order. Al-Mawardi wrote his defence of the caliphate's religious necessity during the very decades the Buyids controlled his own city and could have silenced or ignored him at will; that the argument needed making, and needed making carefully, in a live doctrinal register rather than a settled one, suggests a real stake being contested rather than a fiction everyone privately understood to be empty.

Part X — What the Common Man Actually Bought the Warlord

Reduce the whole argument to what it purchased in practice, and the value becomes concrete rather than merely intangible. A Norman lord ruling England by garrison alone, with no ecclesiastical sanction reaching the English population's own understanding of rightful kingship, would have faced a country whose parish priests — present in every village, trusted by every household, performing the baptisms, marriages, and burials no one imagined living without — owed him nothing and had every institutional reason to keep treating him as what a purely military conquest would have made him look like: an armed foreigner sitting on land that was not his. What Alexander II's edict actually bought William, for the price of a banner, a ring, and a resumed tribute, was the conversion of that entire parish structure, already present and already trusted in every corner of the kingdom, into an instrument that now told its own congregations, on the one authority those congregations already recognised, that this king's rule was legitimate rather than merely imposed. Built from nothing, an equivalent structure of surveillance and persuasion reaching into every English village would have cost William decades and a standing army he did not have to spare. Borrowed from an already-existing,

already-trusted institution, it cost a banner and a debt he chose to resume.

The Buyid and Seljuk case supplies the same arithmetic from the other tradition. A Turkic or Daylami warlord ruling Baghdad by naked force, with no caliphal sanction, would have governed a population whose qadis, whose Friday preachers, and whose own sense of what a legitimate ruler required would have had every doctrinal reason to name him exactly what al-Mawardi's own theology said an unsanctioned ruler was: a usurper, however strong his army. What the caliph's own recognition bought Ahmad ibn Buya and Tughril Beg alike was the same conversion Alexander II performed for William — an existing, trusted, deeply embedded structure, the khutba read in every mosque every Friday, now naming the new ruler as legitimate rather than leaving him to be named, by the same structure, as merely an occupier with better weapons.

Part XI — Held as Tested

What this essay cannot claim, and does not claim, is to have recovered the private sincerity of any single man on either side of either case — not Guiscard's, not William's, not Ahmad ibn Buya's, not the caliph al-Qa'im's own. That question is not recoverable from the sources available to any historian, and the honest response to its unrecoverability is not to guess but to read something else instead: behaviour, and specifically the behaviour of men who paid real, avoidable costs for a currency force alone could not mint. Whether Robert Guiscard privately believed the sacraments he had sworn upon at Melfi were what the Church said they were is a question this essay cannot answer and does not pretend to. What the record does answer, in dates, in figures, in oaths sworn and tribute paid across two entirely separate civilisations that shared no contact and no common source, is that belief — real enough in the men who held it that they suffered, resisted, and paid for it across generations — functioned as load-bearing political infrastructure, robust enough that men who already held every sword worth holding still could not do without what only a disarmed bishop or a captive caliph was able to give them.

The strongest case against this reading is the one Part IX has already tried to hold rather than dismiss: that formed belief and calculated performance are not always distinguishable from the outside, that six years of English suffering under an interdict proves the stakes were felt without proving every soul involved held the theology behind

them with equal conviction, and that a warlord's own motives for paying — genuine reverence, cold calculation, or some inseparable mixture of both he may not have fully sorted out himself — will remain permanently out of reach of the record he left behind. This essay's own answer is not to resolve that uncertainty but to insist it does not matter as much as it first appears to. A belief does not need to be perfectly sincere in every believer to be genuinely load-bearing in the aggregate; it needs only to be real enough, in enough of the people whose cooperation a ruler required, that the ruler could not safely assume its absence. Every warlord this essay has followed made exactly that assumption, and paid to be safe rather than to find out the hard way that he was wrong.

A Note on Sources

The framework is Thomas J. Bryan's; the research and drafting are Claude's (Anthropic). The Fourth Lateran Council's canons, including *Omnis utriusque sexus* and the physician's canon, follow the Council's own text as preserved in standard modern translations and the Catholic Encyclopedia's summary of the seventy canons. The Treaty of Melfi (23 August 1059), its oath formula, the twelve-denier tribute, and its renunciation of the Emperor's special protective duty follow the standard modern historiography, including Susan Wise Bauer's analysis of the treaty's wider significance, cross-checked against the near-contemporary account preserved in Chalandon's history of Norman domination in Italy and Sicily. The 1053 Battle of Civitate and the Norman treatment of the captured Pope Leo IX follow the standard modern accounts. William's embassy to Alexander II, the papal banner, ring, and edict, the restoration of Peter's Pence, and the second coronation at Winchester follow Pope Alexander II's own modern biographical record and the Haskins Society Journal's recent re-examination of the banner's sourcing in William of Poitiers, whose status as the sole contemporary witness is reported honestly rather than smoothed over. The Ermenfrid Penitential's graduated terms are drawn from the ordinance's own surviving text. The khutba's political function and formula, the Hanafi position on Jumu'ah's dependence on recognised authority, and the Five Pillars' ordinary practice follow standard modern

accounts of Islamic ritual and law. Al-Mawardi's doctrine of the caliphate as fard kifaya follows *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya* as represented in the modern secondary literature on his political theology. The Buyid seizure of Baghdad (945), the office of amir al-umara and its earlier claimants including Ibn Ra'iq, and Miskawayh's own contemporary description of the caliph's resignation of government follow the modern historiography of the Buyid dynasty and the Abbasid caliphate under Buyid rule. The Seljuk conquest of Baghdad in 1055, Tughril Beg's sultanate, and the contested marriage negotiation with its specific gift figures follow George Makdisi's study "The Marriage of Tughril Beg" and the standard modern historiography of the Seljuk state. The Papal Interdict of 1208–1214, its terms, Innocent III's instructions limiting its human cost, and the complicating evidence of popular resentment toward the Church itself are drawn from the standard modern historiography of the episode, with Ralph of Coggeshall's eyewitness description of the 1200 French interdict used as the closest available contemporary account of the felt experience of interdiction generally. Where the sources disagree or the evidence is incomplete — the exact scope of Alexander II's sponsorship of the Conquest, the full extent of English popular sentiment during the interdict — this is reported as genuine uncertainty rather than resolved by authorial preference. *Part of the collection* Patterns of Power. *Tested, never revealed.*